Unit .04

Session .04

God Hears His People

Scripture

Exodus 3:2-15; 4:1-5

2 Then the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame
of fire within a bush. As Moses looked, he saw that the
bush was on fire but was not consumed. **3** So Moses
thought, "I must go over and look at this remarkable
sight. Why isn't the bush burning up?" **4** When the
LORD saw that he had gone over to look, God called out
to him from the bush, "Moses, Moses!" "Here I am,"
he answered. **5** "Do not come closer," he said. "Remove
the sandals from your feet, for the place where you are
standing is holy ground." **6** Then he continued, "I am
the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of
Isaac, and the God of Jacob." Moses hid his face because
he was afraid to look at God. **7** Then the LORD said, "I
have observed the misery of my people in Egypt, and
have heard them crying out because of their oppressors.
I know about their sufferings, **8** and I have come down
to rescue them from the power of the Egyptians and to
bring them from that land to a good and spacious land,
a land flowing with milk and honey—the territory of
the Canaanites, Hethites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites,
and Jebusites. **9** So because the Israelites' cry for help has
come to me, and I have also seen the way the Egyptians
are oppressing them, **10** therefore, go. I am sending
you to Pharaoh so that you may lead my people, the
Israelites, out of Egypt." **11** But Moses asked God,
"Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and that I should
bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" **12** He answered, "I
will certainly be with you, and this will be the sign to
you that I am the one who sent you: when you bring
the people out of Egypt, you will all worship God at this
mountain." **13** Then Moses asked God, "If I go to the
Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has
sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?'
what should I tell them?" **14** God replied to Moses, "I
AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the
Israelites: I AM has sent me to you." **15** God also said to
Moses, "Say this to the Israelites: The LORD, the God of
your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and
the God of Jacob, has sent me to you. This is my name
forever; this is how I am to be remembered in every
generation." … **1** Moses answered, "What if they won't
believe me and will not obey me but say, 'The LORD did
not appear to you'?" **2** The LORD asked him, "What is
that in your hand?" "A staff," he replied. **3** "Throw it on
the ground," he said. So Moses threw it on the ground,
it became a snake, and he ran from it. **4** The LORD told
Moses, "Stretch out your hand and grab it by the tail." So
he stretched out his hand and caught it, and it became a
staff in his hand. **5** "This will take place," he continued,
"so that they will believe that the LORD, the God of their
fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the
God of Jacob, has appeared to you."

Intro Options

Main Point:
God sees and responds to the oppressed and suffering.

Option 1

To begin the session, instruct students to call out the names of different charities and organizations they've heard about. Invite a volunteer to write the list on a white board or large piece of paper. Allow students to tell what they know about these organizations and how they are helping those in need. Invite students to name some of the local charities and organizations in your community.

Point out that each of these organizations started because someone saw a need when people were suffering and decided to do something about it.

- **When you see suffering, what are you moved to do?**
- **Do you consider yourself to be a compassionate person who cares about the needs of others? Why or why not?**
- **Have you ever felt like no one cared about you when you were suffering? Did you feel alone, invisible, or unimportant? Explain.**

Emphasize the fact that God always sees His people and their needs. There is never a single moment when God is not aware of your hurt, disappointments, or challenges. Today you will be reminded that God never forgets about His people. He sees our need and will respond with compassion and wisdom.

Option 2

- **Think of the best listener you know. What makes this person a good listener? Explain.**

When we listen well to others, we show them that they matter; we speak highly of their value to us and whether we respect and love them or not. There are many tips and tricks for listening better, but the most important thing is the genuine desire to listen to and understand the other person, as he/she truly wants to be heard and understood. This means: no drifting or simply waiting for the moment they stop talking, so we can begin. Instead, we decide to affirm with our words (e.g. "Yeah," or "Mhm") and presence (e.g. look them in the eye, nod as they speak) that we are listening. We also summarize and repeat the ideas the other person expressed to us to check our understanding and make sure to listen to both ideas and feelings expressed by the other person.[1]

Although our natural tendency is to dive right into what we know or share a personal experience, what others need from us is to be heard. God provides an amazing example of listening. He heard His people—their words and their hearts—and He responded. He does the same for us today.

TEACHING PLAN

As we begin the story of the exodus, the children of Israel lived under a new Pharaoh's rule—one who did not know of Joseph. The Israelites had multiplied so greatly that this Pharaoh oppressed them. Fearing the Israelites would be too powerful, Pharaoh placed the Israelites into bondage. When their numbers continued to grow, he ordered all male babies to be killed.

Against this backdrop, we are introduced to Moses. Moses' mother saved her son's life by placing him in a basket along the banks of the Nile River where Pharaoh's daughter found him and took him in. Moses was spared from death and grew up in Pharaoh's household. But, years later Moses struck down an Egyptian and fled to Midian.

At the end of Exodus 2, the people cried out to God in their distress and God heard them. He remembered His covenant with Abraham and prepared to act. It was time to pay Moses a visit.

Read Exodus 3:2-10.

The people of God were complaining. They were hurting. They were crying out for help. Egypt had once been their land of deliverance. They followed God's guidance there and were preserved from the famine. But they needed deliverance from that land of deliverance. They were in pain and desperate for relief. God heard them when they cried out to Him. God, the creator of everything, listened to the people.

- **Do you ever have trouble believing God hears you when you pray? Why?**
- **List at least two things we learn about God's character from His speech to Moses.**

What we see in this text is a God who not only sees, hears, and knows, but also a God who is working a plan that is for His glory and the good of His people. We see that God is *compassionate*. God sees, cares, and acts when His children are in need. We also learn that God is *attentive* by hearing and responding to the prayers of His children. Finally, we see once again that God is *faithful*; He always does what He says He will do.

- **Which of these characteristics of God have you witnessed in your own life recently?**

When we read this passage, it's easy for the burning bush to capture our attention. As Moses noticed, it wasn't just a bush on fire—the bush was on fire without being burned up. Fire is often used in Scripture to mark the presence of the Lord. We see it here, we see it later in Exodus with the pillar of fire guiding the children of Israel, and we see it at Pentecost in the Book of Acts. The presence of the Lord is what made the ground Moses stood on holy. We can't miss this. God heard His people and responded to their cries according to His character. But His response was not distant. He could have been compassionate, attentive, and faithful from afar. But He chose not to be. Instead, He drew near. God came down to His people to rescue them, as He would in an even greater way in the small town of Bethlehem centuries later.

- **In groups of two or three, identify at least two other examples of God drawing near to His people in Scripture.**

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
God sees and responds to the oppressed and suffering.

Exodus 2–3

2:24-25. When the Bible says God remembered the covenant promises He made to His people (Ex. 2:24-25), it doesn't mean He forgot those promises. God is all-knowing. He doesn't forget things. He's not like you and me in that way. Rather, it means He determined it was time for Him to act on those promises. It was time to rescue His people from their distress and further His plan of redemption through them. Indeed, God remembering is the opposite of forgetting.

3:6.

> If God cannot be seen, why was Moses afraid to look upon Him? The Bible states that God is invisible (1 Tm 1:17; 6:16) and that no one has ever seen Him (Jn 1:18; 1 Jn 4:12, 20). But biblical narrative also makes it clear that God personally visited human beings at various times, and did so in awesome and mysterious ways. The divine disclosure might take the form of a phenomenon of nature—a storm (Jb 38:1), a fire (Dt 4:12), a fiery cloud (Ex 13:21), or a burning bush (vv. 2-4)—or the revelation could be human in appearance (Gn 18:1-33). But the Bible suggests that these self-expressions of God were mediated and partial, not the direct appearance of God in His fullness. The Israelites saw the fire of God, but they did not see Him; they heard God's voice, but they never saw His mouth speaking (Dt 4:12). Moses saw God's form (Nm 12:8), but never saw His face (Ex 33:20-23). When Moses became aware that the bush was burning because God's presence was within it, he showed reverent submission by practicing the timeless Asiatic custom of avoiding eye contact with a superior. To have gazed directly upon God would have been to show contemptuous pride, and risk destruction.[2]

99 Essential Doctrines *(p. 40, DDG)*

God Is Transcendent

God's transcendence refers to the fact that He is distinct from and independent of His created world. He is transcendent over us in regards to His greatness and power as well as His goodness and purity. The implication of this doctrine is that God is inherently superior to humanity; His thoughts and ways are higher than ours (Isa. 55:8-9). When God saves us, He restores us so we can fulfill our human purpose; this does not mean that we become God or that distinctions between God and humanity are obliterated. Understanding God's transcendence evokes awe and wonder at His goodness and power.

TEACHING PLAN

Read Exodus 3:11-15.

In response to God, Moses asked "Who are You?" Moses had just encountered, perhaps for the first time, this God who appeared to him in fire. Moses wanted to understand who this God was. He needed to know, especially if he were to go to Pharaoh on God's behalf and bargain for the release of his entire slave force. Egypt was a polytheistic land, so Pharaoh would naturally ask Moses this question: "Oh, really? Now, which god is it that is sending you?"

In this moment, God revealed His most holy, most personal name to Moses, helping us understand who He is in a whole new way. More specifically, His name helps us see that God is not only above us, but He is among us. To use theological terms, in learning God's name we see that God is both *transcendent* and *immanent*. Transcendent means that God is bigger. He is more than. God is not part of His creation; He is not contained by it. He is above it. Immanent means God is near. He is with us. He is among us. God did not abandon His creation; He is not absent from it. He is active within it.

- **Why do you think it is important that God displays both characteristics? How does His transcendence and immanence offer you hope and comfort today?**

In calling Moses for this task, God wasn't looking for someone who was perfect, eloquent, and confident. He was looking for someone who would rely on Him in this rescue mission. Someone who would obey in faith.

Read Exodus 4:1-5.

Moses knew himself. He knew he wouldn't be trusted by either the Israelites or the Egyptians. The Israelites would see him as an Egyptian—a traitor siding with those who were oppressing them. The Egyptians would see him as an Israelite—a murderer who had betrayed them. So Moses let God in to what he knew: "You have the wrong guy. No one will believe me when I tell them You have spoken to me and chosen me for this task."

Notice, God didn't step in and offer encouragement to boost Moses' self-esteem. God did not give Moses a divine pep talk. "You can do it, Moses! Believe in yourself!" Instead, the Lord gave Moses the first of three signs, evidences of God's power.

Up to this point, God had done a lot of talking to Moses, but when do we see God's power revealed? We see His power after Moses takes a step, even the smallest of ones, in faith. God could have given Moses the signs first, then the task. But that isn't how God tends to work. Instead, He invites His people to trust Him, to step out in faith. When we do, He is there to supply His power. We see this in Moses' calling. We see this in our calling.

- **How have you seen God's power manifested after taking a step in faith and obedience?**

Activity

Place students into groups and assign each group a social justice issue (quality education for all, race, freedom of religion, environmental concerns, etc.). Working within their groups, instruct them to come up with a list of three to five reasons why Christians should want to have a voice in these debates. Then, give them a few minutes to discuss how they should respond to these issues from a Christian worldview.

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
God sees and responds to the oppressed and suffering.

Exodus 3-4

3:14. We live in an age when people believe it's our right to define God. We want to make God in our image—make Him who we want Him to be. Some of us want a God who is wholly transcendent—a God who is distant and leaves us alone. A God we don't have to worry about looking over our shoulders. Others want a God who is wholly immanent. A God who is with us and like us. A God who is more of our peer.

But our place is not to define God; He defines who He is. Here we see that God is both transcendent and immanent at once. God is holy, and God is near. This is the God the children of Israel needed, and this is the God we need as well.

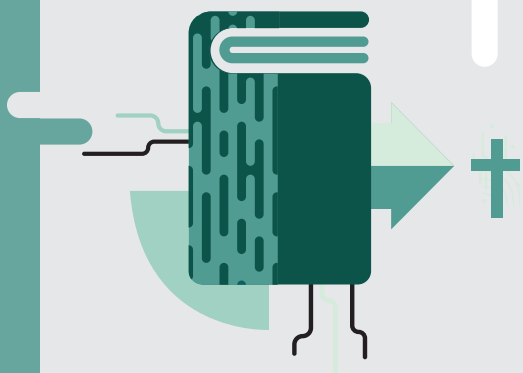
4:10-17. Moses had taken a step of faith and God had revealed His power, but Moses still wasn't convinced. He had more questions, more concerns, more excuses. We see this in Exodus 4:10-17, where Moses asked God to send someone else and then the text says the Lord's anger burned against Moses. The sad irony of Moses' final request is that he had just witnessed what God can do. He had seen a bush burning without being consumed. He had grabbed a snake by its tail to see it become a staff once more. He had placed his hand in his cloak, removed a diseased hand, only to place it back in and remove a clean hand. Yet, Moses could not shake his own inadequacies. To him, his problems and shortcomings made God's miracles seem rather small.

This is why God's anger burned against Moses. God had given him enough. God had showed His power. God had promised His presence. God had foretold His success to deliver His people (Ex. 3:19-22). But Moses' initial faith failed to produce obedience because it was sidetracked by his inability to remove the focus from himself and fix his gaze upon God.

All of us can relate with Moses. We all struggle to trust God and step out in faith and obedience. We all have selective obedience—choosing to obey God willingly and happily when His commands are easy, pleasant, and make sense, but struggling to obey when what He calls us to is terrifying.

(p. 42, DDG) Christ Connection

God told Moses His name "I AM" as a revelation of His transcendent self-existence. Jesus is the eternal Son of God, the great "I AM," who came to us to save us from sin.



GOD HEARS HIS PEOPLE

Exodus 3:2–15, 4:1–5

GOD HEARS HIS PEOPLE

God sees and responds to the oppressed and suffering.

JESUS CONNECTION

God told Moses His name "I AM" to reveal that He is the eternal God. He existed before anything and has no beginning or end. Jesus is the eternal Son of God, the great "I AM," who came to us to save us from sin (John 8:58).

LIFEWISE QUALITY

COMPASSION – Recognizing the suffering of others and taking action to help.

HEAD

How did God offer compassion to the Israelites?

How did God respond to Moses' fears at the burning bush?

HEART

How does it encourage you to know that God hears the cries of the oppressed?

The Bible is full of God's calls for us to pay attention to injustice and oppression in our world. List some specific ways that we can become aware of injustice or help those who are suffering in your community.

HANDS

Create a card for someone who is struggling with their mental, physical, spiritual or emotional health. Write a compassionate message filled with the encouragement you would want to hear if you were struggling. Deliver it this week.